

SAGE Research Methods Cases

Sociology Submission for Consideration

Case Title

A Case Study Using Historical Timelines: Developing a Research Methodology for a Study of Policing Women's Bodies in Ireland

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Criminology

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Gender and Sexuality [SD-Soc-6]

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Advanced Undergraduate

Contributor Biographies

Dr. Christina Quinlan lectures in Social Research Methods in Criminology in the School of Applied Social Sciences at De Montfort University. She has a background in social research and she has worked in Ireland and the UK as a social scientist in third level education and in the community and voluntary sector. Her areas of interest include gender, crime and punishment, media and communications, and social research methods. She has written extensively on women and criminal justice, social control and the state, research methodologies, feminist methodologies, visual methods, action research and ethnography.

Abstract

This SAGE case study details the way in which I developed my research for my journal article entitled Policing Women's Bodies in an Illiberal Society: the case of Ireland. In this SAGE case study, I explain how I carried out the research for this project and how I structured and presented the research in the journal article. The key issue with this research project was the enormous scope of the study. The policing of women's bodies is a very broad topic and this, coupled with the long timeframe of the study, made this project a very big research project.

In order to cope with the scope of the research project, I developed a specific research methodology for the study. This research methodology allowed me:

1. to conduct the study I wanted to conduct, and;
2. to communicate that study concisely and effectively within the limits of a journal article.

The research methodology that I developed for the study a case study methodology using historical timelines.

In this SAGE case study, I explain:

- the issues that I had to deal with in developing the research that drove the search for this methodology;

- the simplicity and the utility of the research methodology developed;
- the way that this research methodology fit with the research project
- the appropriateness of the research methodology for the research project.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this case students should be able to:

- Outline the process of selecting a research methodology for a research project;
- Explain what a case study is, and how a case study research methodology is used in social science research;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the value and utility of historical timelines in social science research;
- Explain what patterns and trends are in data, and why and how patterns and trends in data are used in data analysis;
- Understand the process and value of publishing research as journal articles;
- Demonstrate how a simple structure in the written account of a research project, can facilitate the communication of the complex layered written narrative of the research.

Case Study

Introduction

This SAGE case study details the approach I took to developing and writing my research on the policing of women's bodies in Ireland. The biggest issue was the large scope of the project. I wanted to examine the policing of women's bodies over a very long time period: more than two hundred years. I was writing for the journal *Women & Criminal Justice*. For a journal article, the wordcount is

generally 6,000 to 9,000 words. I was carrying out quite a big research project, and hoping to fit that research into a journal article that would be accepted for publication.

I became interested in this topic when a call for papers was issued for a special edition of the journal *Women & Criminal Justice* focused on the topic of policing women's bodies, to be edited by Professor Meda Chesney Lind. I was immediately very very keen to conduct research on the topic. Meda Chesney Lind is Professor of Women's Studies at the University of Hawaii. In 2015, we were both scheduled to attend the American Society of Criminology Annual Conference in Washington DC, in November of that year. I introduced myself to Meda Chesney Lind via email. She responded very kindly to my email, and we arranged to meet at the conference. When we did meet, we talked about our work, and she talked about this special edition of the journal. I decided to write a journal article on the topic in relation to the experiences of women in the Republic of Ireland. I submitted the journal article for review, and following peer review, the article was published in the special issue of the journal (Quinlan, 2017).

Examining the policing of women's bodies over two hundred years posed a number of problems, mainly, how to fit two hundred years of women's experiences into a journal article of no more than 9,000 words. I wanted more than anything to do justice to the women's experiences. I knew that there was an important story to be told, and I wanted to tell it. It is all too easy to misrepresent individuals, their stories and their experiences in research. When you are writing historical accounts, misrepresentation is arguably even easier, because many of the experiences you are writing about are historical, and so there may be no one left alive to challenge your account of those experiences.

In terms of research ethics, researchers draw on their own ethical code of practice for guidance. A researcher's ethical code is developed through reflection, reflection on the research and on the possible ethical issues in the research, through study of research ethics, and through their knowledge and understanding of various professional codes of ethics that guide them in their work. The British Society of Criminology has a 'Statement of Ethics' which provides guidance for research

(<http://www.britisoccrim.org/ethics/>). The British Sociological Association publishes 'Guidelines on Ethical Research', (<https://www.britisoc.co.uk/ethics>).

A key advantage to publishing a journal article lies in the fact that a journal article is published faster than a book, and a journal article, when published, is immediately available online to all those who have access to the journal. This means that scholars of criminology, of women's studies, of sociology, and of the social sciences will have immediate access to this publication. There is generally a relatively short turnaround for journal articles, and this journal article was no different. I decided to write the journal article in November 2015, and it was finally published in January 2017. That's a short timeframe for a peer reviewed academic publication. Peer review is the critical process to which published academic work is subject. Through the peer review process, a proposed publication, in this case my journal article, is sent for anonymous review to usually two or three reviewers. Peer reviewers are academics working in the field of the subject matter of the proposed publication. These peer reviewers read the proposed publication, critically engage with it, and send back a report with comments to the editor. The editor then allows the author of the publication an opportunity to revise the proposed publication in light of the critique and comments of the reviewers. When the author has completed this work, and re-submitted the proposed publication, the publication is again sent for review, and if the reviewers are happy with the amendments made, the work is published. The process is designed to ensure that the highest standards are maintained in academic publication.

Due to their comparatively short length, journal articles can easily be read and used to teach students. Each journal article provides a good example of a relatively short account of a research project. Students can study journal articles to learn how to conceptualise research projects, how to develop aims and objectives for research projects, how to construct and write literature reviews, how to present research methodologies, how to present data analysis and how to write research

conclusions and recommendations. Every aspect of each journal article can be studied as a pedagogical tool in research methods.

Finding a Methodology

When I started to think about my idea for this research project, a number of different research methodologies immediately came to mind. At heart, I am an ethnographer, and my PhD research, which was published by Irish Academic Press (Quinlan, 2011), was an ethnographic study. Ethnography is the in-depth study of a culture, and I could see how this methodology might fit with the research, in terms of examining the culture in Ireland of policing women's bodies.

However, I wasn't really interested for this particular research project in examining the culture of policing women's bodies. I was more interested in examining the experiences of women of having their bodies policed, and doing this over a time period of 200 years. In data gathering, ethnographers often use in-depth one-to-one, usually face-to-face interviews as the key data gathering method. Clearly, I wasn't going to be able to interview women who had lived their lives through all of the decades of the past 200 years! So I decided that ethnography was not a good fit in terms of the research methodology for this project.

Then I thought about historical analysis. This research methodology certainly worked in terms of my interest in examining two hundred years of women's experiences. However, there was an issue with fitting an historical analysis of two hundred years of women's experiences into a 9,000 word journal article. This problem made me think that historical analysis, although a good fit in many respects in terms of research methodology, was not quite the right research methodology for this research project.

I began to think about breaking this large topic down into sections or categories. I wanted to do this in order to make the topic more manageable as a research project. I reflected for some time on this,

and eventually decided that the key areas of concern could be conceptualised essentially under three headings; sexuality, reproduction and abortion. I have written a great deal about women's experiences of justice and women's experiences of criminal justice in Ireland (Quinlan, 2011, 2013, 2015). For this publication, with its focus on the policing of women's bodies, I felt that there was an opportunity to develop a strong, concise yet comprehensive, critical account of women's experiences of having their bodies policed in relation to their experiences of sexuality, reproduction and abortion. Such experiences are, and they have long been, difficult for women in many countries around the world (see McCormack, 2009, Hayes, Lorenz and Bell, 2013, and Chesney Lind, 2006). In Ireland, for many women, these experiences have been, and they continue to be, shocking,, and these experiences allowed me to frame an academic research project, and to conceptualise this research project, under those three key headings. As soon as I began to think about the research in this way, it became clear to me that a case study methodology was the most appropriate research methodology for this research project.

Case study research is essentially the in-depth study of some phenomenon and generally the phenomenon under investigation can be conceived of as a bounded entity (Quinlan, 2011 and 2015, see also Simons 2009 and Yin 2014). In other words, you can put a boundary around the phenomenon in some way. For example, a critical incident might be considered a bounded entity. Everything that happened in relation to the incident is within the boundary. Everything that happened that is not related to the incident is outside the boundary. A class in a school or college might be considered a bounded entity, everything and everyone within the class are within the bounded entity. Everything and everyone outside the class is outside of the bounded entity. Case studies are concerned with what is within the boundary of the entity, concerned with examining, exploring, documenting, and critiquing everything within the boundary relevant to the case study. It's a research methodology that facilitates the production of a deep, rich and complex insight into the phenomenon under investigation.

. As I reflected on my research, as I conceptualised the research as a case study, I began to see more and more clearly how I would develop the research project. In case study research, there can be one case or more than one case. Case studies can focus on many things, including places, experiences, people, institutions or aspects of institutions, or themes. In this research project, I would have three cases: sexuality, reproduction and abortion. I was going to examine the policing of women's bodies in Ireland in relation to sexuality, reproduction and abortion. Now I had some structure for the study, with these three cases, I began to see how I could construct the study, and how I would present the journal article.

While this was real progress, within each of the three cases of sexuality, reproduction and abortion, I still had to deal with the issue of the long timeline that interested me. I wanted to conduct my study from the late 1700's to the present day. It seemed clear to me, given my research background, knowledge and experience, that this timeframe was relevant to the study, but two hundred years of women's experiences still seemed too big a topic for a journal article. That being said, I believe that it is important to examine and attempt to explain the history of women's experiences, in order to develop some understanding of the contemporary experiences of women.

Using our criminological, or our sociological, imagination, (see Young, 2011, and Wright Mill, 1959), we are encouraged to think about how an individual's biography is historically situated, how a person's experience of the social world is shaped in large part by their historical positioning within the social world. Our lives emerge from and are shaped by history. We can learn a great deal about society from the experiences of individuals, and we can learn a great deal more if we consider the experiences of a number of individuals over a wide historical timeframe. This perspective helped me develop my study and it provided me with a rationale for the study.

A case study using historical timelines

I thought about and reflected on the issue of the scope of the study for a while, and I did some searches on the internet, using Google Scholar. I tried to find similar research to the study I was carrying out. I was hoping that perhaps some other researcher might have encountered this problem before me, and come up with a solution to it. In the end, I came up with the solution myself. The solution was timelines. There is lots of timeline software on the internet. If you do an internet search for timeline software you will find a great deal of it. If you look at the images of all of the timelines available, you can select the timeline that appeals to you, one that fits with the research that you're thinking about and, perhaps, working on (see for example Timeline Templates for Professionals: <https://www.officetimeline.com/timeline-template>).

I searched for the simplest timeline I could find. It took a little time to find it, and then it took a little time to figure out how I was going to use it in my research. Once I had found the timeline that I wanted to use, I adapted the timeline to my purpose. The timeline that I used is depicted in Fig. 1. You can see in Fig. 1 the way that I used the timeline in my research. The timeline depicted in Fig. 1 is the sexuality timeline. I used three timelines in the study, one of each of the cases, i.e. sexuality, reproduction and abortion. Using each of the three timelines, I detailed the key milestones, as I understood them, in relation to each of the three cases throughout the centuries. The important thing to note here is the amount of time that I spent reflecting on my research strategies. I engaged in this reflection for a number of months, and all that time I was polishing the research as I developed it conceptually. I was continually developing the research statement, the aim and objectives of the study, and I was engaging with the literature, reading the literature in the field and writing the literature review.

As can be seen in Fig. 1, the sexuality timeline begins with the established in 1765 in Ireland of the Magdalen Asylums, designed to shelter and discipline sexually active unmarried women. The timeline ends in 2015, when the Marriage Equality Act, legalising same-sex marriage, was enacted. Between these two points in the timeline contains a number of other key milestones.

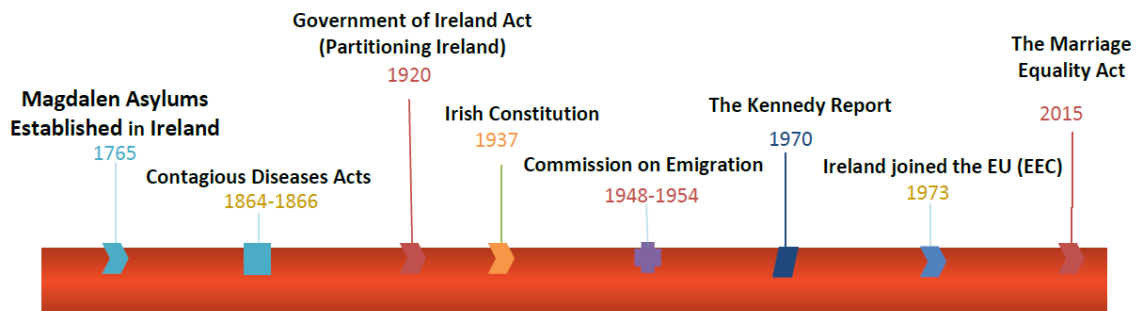


Fig. 1: Policing of Women's Bodies in Relation to Sexuality Timeline

Description: This timeline is one of three used in my study on policing women's bodies in Ireland. The timeline shown has eight key milestones. The first is dated 1765, and it records the establishment in Ireland of Magdalen Asylums. These were charitable institutions designed to shelter and discipline women engaged in proscribed sexuality activity, including sexual activity outside of marriage and prostitution. The final milestone in the timeline is dated 2015, and it marks the enactment in law of the Marriage Equality Act in Ireland. This legislation allowed in law for the marriage of same-sex couples. As explained, between the first and final milestone in the timeline there are six other milestones, each marking a development in women's experiences in terms of the policing of their bodies in relation to sexuality. The other two timelines used in the study, but not presented here, deal in a similar way with the policing of women's bodies in relation to reproduction and abortion.

In this way, by highlighting key milestones throughout the timeframe of the study, I was able to condense the experiences of women over the centuries, while developing a simple, coherent and concise narrative detailing women's experiences. I used key milestones to provide the structure that I needed to simplify the story I had to tell, so I could:

1. provide a responsible, ethical, and complete narrative of women's experiences, and;

2. effectively communicate the research within the limitation imposed by the wordcount allowed for the journal article.

Using a timeline - what this allows

Using the timelines I was able to provide the narrative, and of course the reader, with visual representations of critical moments in women's experiences. I was able to show how the development of key institutions, how the enactment of key legislation, how cultural and social shifts, as well as the critical key experiences of individual women, all shaped the history, the developing narrative, of women's experiences. This research methodology that I developed, a case study research methodology with historical timelines, facilitated the narrating of that history, and it showed clearly the patterns and trends in that history. I was able to show for example how the Irish Constitution, enacted in 1937, recognised and to some degree established that the rightful place for women was in the home. Following on from this, I showed how a Commission on Emigration from Ireland, established in the late 1940's, established that, at the time, emigration from Ireland was a particularly female phenomenon, and that much of this pattern of female emigration was driven by the oppressive vision of the ideal of Irish womanhood prevalent in Ireland at the time, of which sexual purity was a primary characteristic.

I showed how women were regulated and their behaviours and activities managed more through systems of social control than through the mechanisms of the criminal justice system. For example, I explained that in 1951, there was a daily average of 43 women in prison in Ireland, and 2003 women confined in institutions such as mother and baby homes and Magdalen Institutions. I showed in the journal article how such practices developed, the grounds on which they were perpetuated, and the consequences of such practices for women at the time, and for women since that time.

The weight of evidence provided by the long historical timeframe of the study established the propensity that persists in Ireland, the willingness of Irish society, to engage in the policing of women's bodies.

Patterns and Trends

Patterns and trends in data show where and how experiences are common, where and how very many individuals, or very many institutions, organisations or societies, have or have had a common experience. One example given above is of the patterns in emigration from Ireland and the phenomenon of female emigration and the experiences driving that emigration. There is also, as explained above, the weight of evidence in research, where evidence from one source backs up, or supports, an insight the researcher developed from another source or other sources. In this way, the researcher gathers all of the resources available, all of the data possible, to establish the case that they are trying through their research to establish.

As well as patterns and trends, researchers are searching for those experiences that stand out from the pattern, stand out from the trend. Such experiences are sometimes conceived of as outliers. The experience that goes against the pattern or trend, that lies outside the pattern or trend, is often worth examining from a research point of view. It's interesting to consider that experience, to consider how and why that experience happened, and what this means. A researcher reflecting on patterns and trends in data, and experiences that lie outside of the patterns and trends in data, can develop a complex layered and nuanced narrative that provides a comprehensive insight into the phenomenon under investigation.

Telling the story – writing the narrative

Telling the story of the research is arguably the most important element of the research project. This aspect is where all of the work of the research project is made public, and where the value of the research is communicated. The essential value of the research project lies in its contribution to knowledge, and this value propels the researcher through the work of the research project.

When the researcher is writing up the research, there are a number of possible narratives that might be told. The necessary story is evident to the researcher. It is evident because it is the story that the researcher has been trying to tell from the beginning, and the search for a research methodology that the researcher engaged in, was the researcher searching for the right way to tell the story that needed to be told about the research. The research methodology that I developed for the research allowed me to tell the story that I wanted to tell about the research. I have explained in some detail what I did with the sexuality timeline, and how I used the timeline to tell the story.

I did the same with the other two timelines, the reproduction timeline and the abortion timeline. The reproduction timeline details the experiences of unmarried mothers in Ireland and the way they were treated. The timeline shows the various methods proposed for reforming 'first time offenders' and punishing 'recidivists' and those who could not or would not be reformed. The methodology allowed me to show how the harshest treatment was reserved for those perceived as unworthy, weak-willed, incorrigible, repeat offenders, sexual deviants or prostitutes" (Quinlan, 2017, 62). The timeline allowed me to use the experiences of individual women/children to build the weight of evidence for my research project.

I showed through the stories detailed in the timelines, how public anger, shame and sorrow at the treatment of some women forced change in Ireland, through often heated and bitter debate. For example, I told the story of Anne Lovatt. In 1984, Anne Lovatt was a 15 year old convent school girl who had hidden the fact that she was pregnant out of shame and fear. She died on a dark cold January day, after giving birth alone and in secret at a Marian shrine. The baby she gave birth to, a son, also died. I show in the journal article how the experiences of Anne Lovatt, with the similar

experiences of many other women, fueled a public outcry from local communities for change, and I show how this fundamental change at local level contributed to the modernisation of Ireland, as much as macro level developments such as Ireland's entry into the EEC (European Economic Community), now the European Union.

In telling the story of the research, the researcher wants to show, with a weight of evidence, i.e. the data gathered, what the experience or phenomenon was, why the experience or phenomenon matters, and what the experience or phenomenon means. The experience, or phenomenon, can have multiple meanings and multiple implications for different individuals, groups and sectors of society. In writing the research, the researcher is trying to communicate this complexity, and trying to do so in an engaging way. Above all, the researcher wants the research to be read, to be understood, and to be acknowledged as a scientific contribution to knowledge.

Women's lives, women's histories

My PhD research focused on two-hundred years of women's experiences in prison in Ireland. When I started working for my PhD, many books had been published about men's experiences of prison, but there were no books detailing the experiences of women. When I completed my PhD, I was fortunate to have the work published by Irish Academic Press (Quinlan 2011), so my research into women's experiences of imprisonment in Ireland, over 200 years, is now available in many university libraries around the world. These women's stories will possibly be read for years to come by scholars of criminology and penology, by sociologists and by social scientists, and by people who have a general interest in women's lives and women's experiences, and women's experiences of prison.

We social scientists are tasked with studying the social world and documenting our study of that world using social scientific methods. We need sociological, or criminological imaginations, so that we can see how history and biography intersect. We need to be able to see how the individual is historically positioned, and how the individual will consequently experience the social world, in the context of that historical positioning. We need to be able to see and to understand, and in turn

communicate, this perspective that we have on the social world. We do this so that we can, all of us, understand how the social world works, so that we can appreciate how we are, and who and what we are, so that we can clearly see how the past shapes both the present and the future.

What was accomplished

In my research project developed using its case study with historical timelines research methodology, I was able to situate, examine and document women's experiences of sexuality, reproduction and abortion within a framework of the policing of women's bodies. As well as detailing the experiences of women, the work allowed for the opening up of a public discourse on these experiences. In this way, social science research can contribute to public debate and can help shape public consensus. Instead of allowing the past to dictate the present and the future, we can critically engage with the past, and use this critical engagement to help us understand the present, and then we can collectively imagine, create and even shape a better present and a better future.

Research as political activism

Research can be conceived of having both scientific and creative parts. In order to engage in research we must understand and apply social science methods and standards to our work.

The work of each social scientist is valuable. It is the work of documenting, challenging, and re-shaping the social world. The accumulated efforts of social scientists provide knowledge and understanding of the social world, as well as insight into the issues, the problems, the imbalances, the injustices, the inequalities of that world. Good social science research, when it is made public, provides challenges to the social order, and these challenges, ideally, lead to change.

Reflections on the process

My work on this research project is work of social and political activism as much as it is work of the social sciences. The research documents and highlights the shameful treatment of some women. The work for the journal article led me to developing a method that allowed me to explain and detail

women's experiences. This method, case study using historical timelines, forced me to identify in two centuries of history, the key milestones, the key turning points, for those experiences. The peer reviewers of the journal article liked the historical perspective I brought to the issue of policing women's bodies and they welcomed the way that I linked women's experiences of sexuality, reproduction and abortion to the criminal justice system, and to the experiences that some women had and continue to have of both criminal justice and social justice.

Now that it is published, the work will contribute to a collective understanding of the cruel, in some cases arguably criminal, and always intolerable, nature of the policing of women's bodies. This published research has the potential to contribute to a public discourse which will help to bring about change.

I enjoyed writing this SAGE Case Study. My hope is that this SAGE Case Study will help and inspire many emerging social scientists with and in their dedication to their work.

Exercises and Discussion Questions

1. What do you think of the scope of this research ? Was it too big? Explain your answer.
2. In the SAGE Case Study above, different research methodologies are considered . Do you think that there were other options in terms of an appropriate research methodology for the research? Explain your answer.
5. What is case study research methodology, and what kind of research is produced using a case study research methodology?
6. What are historical timelines and how can they be used in social science research?

7. The SAGE case study above provides an example of how rich data, in the form of centuries of accumulated human experience, can be condensed into a clear meaningful narrative that fits within the scope of a relatively short research project. Give an example of a research project that you might be interested in developing using the research methodology Christina developed, a case study using historical timelines.

Web Resources

Free Timeline Templates for Professionals: <https://www.officetimeline.com/timeline-template>

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